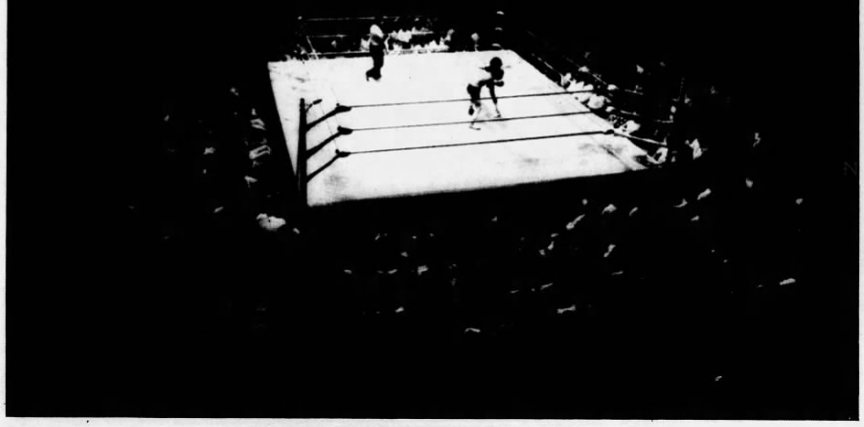
Newspapers by ancestry
https://www.newspapers.com/image/578641630

Downloaded on Mar 25, 2024

photo by Willie Middlebrook

AT THE OLYMPIC AUDITORIUM'S THURSDAY NIGHT FIGHTS, WHAT LOOKS TO BE SURE-FIRE THEATRE-OF-CRUELTY CAN TURN INTO SOMETHING WHOLLY OTHER, LIKE MAYBE THE HUMAN DRAMA OF ATHLETIC DECOMPOSITION. BRAINS, EYES, LOOKS, ALL LAID ON THE LINE FOR ALMOST NO MARBLES! HOW POIGNANT!



DAMON RUNYON SLEPT HERE

BY RICHARD MELTZER

NO SE PERMITE TRAER A LA ARENA BOTELLAS BOTES O OTROS OBJETOS reads the sign over the general admission entrance and below it BOTTLES & CANS NOT ALLOWED IN AUDITORIUM, suggesting that if you're Anglo extraneous objects're cool. I have none on me but the sloppy once-over I get from the T-shirted security person is so unthorough I could probably've snuck in a half-pint of scotch in my sportjack pocket. It ain't the intoxicant itself they're concerned about — hey, the Cerveza flows here like agua fria! — it's just that empty bottles and cans can do a lot more *damage* when heaved ringward following an unpopular decision than a cup o' beer, empty, full or in between. A Thursday night like any other at the Olympic Auditorium, 18th & Grand, the only fight club in America with boxing every week of the goddam year. This must be my 35th trip inside.

A paraplegic with a loud, booming voice sells me a program that is so crudely mass-produced you can see the ink from the other side, announcing this time a "double main event" of Rocky Garcia vs. Roberto Torres followed by Roberto Elizondo vs. Norman Goins. No, I've made this mistake before, program person is not paraplegic, only birth-defected and cannot walk right (deformed arm & hand and a shave to prove it). Not everybody is buyin' programs however, a reflection of the general mood of economy brought on by the jump in price to ten bucks for ringside (not long ago it was five, the current rate for general ad., and once in a while they even had these giveaways of ringside for *one dollar* if you bought your ticket one week in advance). People're evidently saving their change for brew. At the beer stand a redneck from the Valley, presumably just wanting to make contact with an available Caucasian face in the midst of so much Aztlan overkill, borrows my program and finds he's never heard of any of tonight's attractions even tho he comes here "almost every week — to get away from the old lady." Among Olympic regulars rampant unconcern for the particulars of a given weekly card is par for the course but usually it doesn't take such an, uh, epistemological twist. Beer this week (buck seventy-five for a large) is Coors. In the last couple years it's been Hamm's, Busch, Olympia, Tecate, can't recall what else right now, but there've been *several*. Monopoly seems to rotate on a weekly basis like Pepsi/Coke at the Greek burger joint on *Saturday Night Live*. Lowest bidder (one guesses) gets the concession.

One thing that never changes tho is the fabulous decor. What used to be a classy marble floor (currently so cracked & cruddy it could pass for weathered linoleum). Palatial height to the walls and ceilings, not exactly art deco but art *something* you can bet your boots. Framed yellowed blowups of pugilists of yore: Tony Canzoneri, Ace Hudkins, Mickey Walker, Bud Taylor, the less antediluvian Jose Becerra and whoever "The Popular Sporty Harvey" might happen to be. Lots of dust and dinge in every corner and alcove, coats o' paint where the color choice never makes any sense (paint is paint). Your feet stick to the floor from beer that ain't been mopped since 1938. This place really lets the customers in on its crust. In antiseptic L.A. this joint is an existential godsend, been around since 1925 but now more relevant than ever.

Program has no amateurs listed, perhaps one of the *welcome* changes wrought by Rogelio Robles, Aileen Eaton's recently acquired partner in promotion. For years the first three fights of the night were three-rounders featuring starry-eyed youngsters from the local gyms whose main proclivity was holding their opponent's glove with *both* of theirs, thus freeing the guy's remaining fist to bash their baby-face in, fine fun & games for sure (and fewer bucks off Mrs. Eaton's ass). Didn't sit too well the punters, tho. Even the meagerest of pros have a firmer grasp of the parameters of fistic firepower the fans would *prefer* to see. As the first pair of leatherpushers climb thru the ropes and dapper ring announcer Jimmy Lennon flips his oversize "coin" to determine who goes to which corner, names on the robes are the tipoff that no-ams is indeed the policy (swell). As scheduled, Jaime Garza (17-0) vs. Lorenzo Ramirez (12-4-2), super bantamweights (122 lbs.), six rounds. Lennon, uncle of Sisters of the same name (true), reaches for the overhead mike being *manually* lowered by a guy all the way up in the murky rafters, does the introductions, apologizes for his "bout with laryngitis" and the fight is underway. 'S all over at 1:57 of the fourth and Ramirez takes a l-o-n-g time getting up, prompting one general ad. regular to yell, "Fake! Fake!" (tank jobs are not uncommon). "Still undefeated," announces Lennon, hefting Garcia's arm skyward. The applause is less than thunderous but still a good semi-roar that echoes thru the half-empty building.

More than half-empty actually. Can't be more than maybe 3,000 people on hand (full it holds 10,000), of which a greater percentage than I remember ('s been many months) is Cauc and Asian. Could be the actual body count on both groups is same as always but the proportion has definitely changed a tad, aforementioned economics being the likeliest explanation (i.e., white & yellow make more bread). Usual mere sprinkling of blacks and otherwise it's like

Continued on page 13

Copyright © 2024 Newspapers.com. All Rights Reserved.
Powered by Newspapers.com